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The Tension Between Knowing and Doing

C. William Pollard

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Pollard, C. William, "The Tension Between Knowing and Doing" (1996). *C. William Pollard Papers*. 53.
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“THE TENSION BETWEEN KNOWING AND DOING”
SEATTLE PACIFIC UNIVERSITY
NOVEMBER 22, 1996

C. WILLIAM POLLARD, CHAIRMAN
THE SERVICEMASTER COMPANY
DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS

I am delighted to be with you today and share some thoughts about business and faith.

(REFER TO SOUL OF THE FIRM IF IT IS USED IN THE INTRODUCTION)

As all of you know, I come to the subject, not from the perspective of a professor or minister, but simply as a business person who is spending most of my waking hours in the marketplace making money, and yes, seeking to be a witness of the Lord I love and to have a ministry among the people He loves.

Most of us here today, share a common belief in Christ and we are interested in business. Do God and profit mix or is the world of profit and business simply a necessary evil that we must keep separate from the spiritual world in our life in Christ. Jesus put it this way as recorded in Mark: Chapter 8, “Then Jesus turned and looked at His disciples, he

rebuked Peter, get behind me Satan He said, you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of man. If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the Gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his own soul?" To put this issue in a modern context, in fact directly to those of you who are here today, who are students and are business majors. Why are you business majors and not bible majors? Why are you contemplating making money in the business world versus being a minister or missionary? What is the life of a Christian all about?

Several weeks ago, I attended a memorial service for one of my colleagues at ServiceMaster. Bob Brondyke had come to that point of life where the question of what's it all about was reality. At the relatively young age of 44 he learned he had terminal cancer. He died six months later. Bob was an officer of our Company responsible for a five state region. He spent a good bit of his time during the week on the road and away from home. His wife and two lovely children: Rob, 20, a sophomore at college and Matt, eighteen, a senior at high school. His memorial service was unique. It was conducted primarily by his friends at ServiceMaster, who not only talked about Bob's faith in God but also how that affected the

way he treated people. Bob's young son also participated in the memorial service. He made a very significant statement when he said as he looked back at his father's life for the past twenty years. There was nothing more that he could ask of his father than what his father had given him.

What was it all about for Bob? Who owned him? The God he loved. What was the result? The story was told by his family and his friends and the people he touched. Yes he spent most of his time in business participating in the process of making money, but the meaning and ministry of his work was in the lives of people. So is it good or bad to spend your time making money? Money is not evil, nor does it have a darkside. It is amoral. It is a resource to be used and invested, or abused, wasted and discarded. If it becomes an end goal in your life, it will bankrupt your soul. On the other hand, if you use it as a resource, you can fulfill your responsibility of being a faithful steward. But how does this happen and how do we integrate our faith with what we do? With the way we live and conduct ourselves as we go about making money, providing goods and services to consumers.

I can tell you the story from our environment. The story about ServiceMaster. We will be celebrating our 50th year, next year. We were

founded by a man who simply wanted to have a ministry in the marketplace. We have grown rapidly over the years, including over the last 25 years. Doubling in size every 3 to 3 1/2 years with consistent growth in revenue and profits - every quarter, every year over this 25 year period. I have a video here today of a review of our business. How we approach the marketplace, how we approach what we are doing as well as why we are doing it. It is a video we show to our people, to Wall street, to tell the story of ServiceMaster. After we see it, maybe we can have a discussion about what it means.

SHOW VIDEO

AFTER VIDEO RAISE QUESTIONS REGARDING SHAREHOLDERS QUESTION.

1. Listen to a letter I recently received from one of our shareholders:

“While I firmly support the right of an individual to his religious convictions and pursuits, I totally fail to appreciate the concept that ServiceMaster is in fact a vehicle for the work of God. The multiple references to this effect, in my opinion, do not belong in an annual business Report. To interpret a service for profit, which is what

ServiceMaster does, as a work of god is an incredible presumption.

Furthermore, to make a profit is not a sin. I urge that next year's business report be to just that: Business."

How would you answer this shareholder? What would you say in response to the question what is there in common between God and profit? The link, I believe, is people--not just Christian, but all people created in God's image. We are not a Christian company. Many of our officers are Christian, but we also have officers who are Muslim, Jewish, or of no professed faith. We are sometimes criticized, as this shareholder did, for our mixing of God and profit, but seldom for our performance. These objectives set the standard for those of us who profess faith in Christ, to do what is right as we seek to walk the talk. Yes, not only to integrate our faith with our learning, but to integrate our faith with what we do with our actions as we work with others. It provides a wonderful opportunity for a Christian to lead--to lead by example and service. It has been an environment that for me is a constant reminder of who owns me; that my hope extends beyond myself.

2. Another issue:

How does a company like this approach downsizing - laying off 5,000

people in an inefficient business.

3. How does it deal with the issue of recognizing and honoring a top manager who is also a gay.
4. What is the role of God in a pluralistic environment or in a business environment?

Give story of student from Harvard -

5. Shu Zhang letter -

As I conclude, I would like you to listen to this letter I recently received from one of our employees. She is someone I am working with. She is a seeker. She was raised and educated in China, indoctrinated in communism, and now works for ServiceMaster.

Shu Zhang

4107 W. Northgate #723
Irving, Tx

May 8, 1996

Dear Bill:

I have felt so much need to talk with you since I came back from the seminar. When I grew up in China, religions were forbidden and the

Communist taught us religion was superstition. Mao's book became our bible. When I was five or six years old, I could recite Mao's quotations and even used them to judge and lecture the kids in the neighborhood. Mao said: Serve The People; The Leaders Should Be Public Servants. It coincides with some of ServiceMaster's moral standards. When I think deeply and I see the difference which makes one work so successfully and another collapse fatally. That's the starting point of ServiceMaster: Every individual has been created in God's image with dignity and worth. Ten years ago in China people were not allowed to think and speak freely. Those who held different opinions and views with the government were treated as enemy and enemy were not human being anymore. When people found out Mao was just another Chinese emperor we lost our believing. This is the generation who had been brainwashed since we were born. When I went to Beijing last March with you and Ralph, I met with my high school classmates, they talked a lot about the current material oriented Chinese young people. We shared a lot of excitement for the big change in the Chinese economy which brought tremendous opportunities for us but also worried about the generation with beliefs and moral standards.

Another big reward from the seminar is I got a breakthrough in understanding the way ServiceMaster's business is organized. My

roommate is a dietary director in a Birmingham hospital. She told me a lot of details about her work and the way her division was organized. When M.L. Hillard talked about the different types of modern organizations, I was amazed! I had heard this kind of saying: a fine organization is a piece of art work, I began to understand the meaning of this saying. ServiceMaster is designed to be a big and tall tree with strong roots which penetrate extensively to almost every corner of people's daily life. It's still growing.

I was so impressed with the variety of ServiceMaster executives. They have very different personalities and styles which was reflected in the way they were teaching and talking. They gave me an impression - this is a collective that has tremendous energy and vitality. I really enjoyed their lectures!

I won't forget the class you taught. The only thing I could see is the wisdom of a great thinker, it's this kind of wisdom that makes the world we live so amazing. I kept asking myself: can you imagine how fast you could grow if you could work with a mentor like Mr. Pollard?

Thank you for offering the opportunity to attend such a good seminar. It's a very valuable experience for me and I feel another window is open for my mind. I appreciate your arrangement for my meeting with Bob Erickson, he is a very nice man, I enjoyed talking to him.

Take care and enjoy the sunny May.

Sincerely,

Shu Zhang

* * * * *

November 18, 1996

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